INTERVIEWS OF
BETTY CUNNINGHAM and LINDA WILLIAMS

INTERVIEWEES:	BETTY CUNNINGHAM and LINDA WILLIAMS
INTERVIEWER:	TEALEY ELLIS
ALSO PRESENT:	JUDITH ROBERTSON
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PLACE OF INTERVIEW:	HOME OF INTERVIEWEES
LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:	41 minutes (21 pages)

JUDITH ROBERTSON: I'm Judith Robertson, a volunteer with the Fairview Oral History Project. The project is part of the North Carolina Room special collections at Pack Memorial Library. The North Carolina Room's mission is to collect, preserve and provide access to the history of Buncombe County and the surrounding area. The items in the North Carolina Room include paper items such as photos, postcards, manuscripts, maps and the like, as well as recorded oral histories from folks like you. All the recordings made and historical materials collected for the project, will become part of the congregate collection at Pack Library. Your interview will be transcribed, with your permission, and preserved for anyone interested in local history, as well as for future generations. With your permission, the transcript will also be added to our online data base.

Documents of all types, including photos and letters, will be stored in

our climate-controlled storage area. They will also be scanned, so there will be a digital copy on a computer. If you prefer to keep the documents, they can be scanned and returned to you. Our goal is to find missing pieces of information and to record your first-person narrative regarding your experiences living in Fairview.

This is Judith Robertson recording the oral history of Betty Cunningham and Linda Williams at their home on Merrill Road in Fairview, at 11:05 on June the 13th, 2018, for the Fairview Oral History Project, in the North Carolina Room at Pack Library in the Buncombe County library system. The Conditions of Use Form for sound and video recording has been signed by the interviewees.

TEALEY ELLIS: My name is Tealey Ellis and I'm a volunteer with the Fairview, North Carolina, public library oral history project. Today I'm interviewing Betty Cunningham and her daughter, Linda Williams, at their home on Merrill Road, Fairview, North Carolina. Those two interview forms have been signed.

Thank you both for volunteering to share your information with us and this project.

Since both of you are being interviewed, as I ask some of the questions, I will try and remember to say each person's name so that when it's transcribed and printed they know who to--those transcribers will know who to assign that comment to.

So, Miss Cunningham, I'd like to start with you, and if you could tell me where you were born. If it was in this area, you know, kind of specifically where.

BETTY CUNNINGHAM: I was born on Merrill Road.

TE: Okay. And was it in the picture of the house that we saw?

BC: No.

TE: Okay. But on Merrill Road and this is where you live now, also.

BC: Yes.

TE: Okay. What were your parents' names and where were they born?

BC: My dad's name was Crawford Merrill, and my mother's name was Gertrude.

TE: Okay. And where were they born?

BC: They were born here.

TE: On Merrill Road, also?

BC: No. No. Trying to think.

LINDA WILLIAMS: Grandmother was born in Asheville.

TE: Okay. All right. Thank you. Thank you both very much. What about your grandparents, their names. Do we have those?

That's okay if you can't find it. Miss Cunningham, what kind of work did your parents do? Were they farmers?

BC: Yes.

TE: What kind of crops? Do you remember what kind of crops that they grew?

BC: Growing tobacco, big gardens.

TE: Tobacco. Big gardens. Yeah. Was a lot of canning of the food going on?

BC: Oh, yes. Yes.

TE: Were you ever involved in that?

BC: Yes.

TE: What was your job to do when you were helping to can the food?

BC: Break beans and just a little bit of everything.

TE: Did you ever have to wash the jars?

BC: I sure did.

TE: I don't think you liked that, did you?

BC: [Laughing] We washed lots of jars. Mother canned a lot.

TE: I'm sure she did. I'm sure it was good though to have to eat in the winter, when winter came around, that's for sure.

What about livestock? Did you have cows?

BC: Cows, horses.

TE: Pigs?

BC: Pigs.

TE: Okay. Do you remember, with the pigs in particular, hog-killing time and what that involved?

BC: Yes.

TE: Could you tell me about that?

BC: Well, we did, down this way. There's a little branch that run down through there, and they killed the hogs over there and we had a spring house and they would clean the hogs, getting ready. Anyway, they'd put that meat in the spring house after a little while, till we got it all done.

TE: Okay. Did you have a smokehouse to hang hams in?

BC: Yes.

TE: Yep. I'm sure that somebody from the family would go in there during the winter, maybe, and cut off some and bring in to eat?

BC: They did that, yeah. Hams. That was good, too.

TE: Cured ham. That's for sure. What about--I'm sure you had chickens? Did you have chickens? Lots of eggs?

BC: Uh-huh.

TE: Did you ever gather the eggs? Was that part of your chores, as well?

BC: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

TE: What would you say that maybe your favorite memory of helping in the family business, you know, you had chores to do and various things like that. What was your favorite childhood memory of your chores and what you had to do? Did you like one thing more than another?

BC: Oh, yeah.

TE: What did you like best?

BC: I liked gathering the eggs and I helped my grandmother out. And she'd make sugar cookies. And I thought that was the best thing. And they would have apples on the hearth in the wintertime. And they would keep and they were so good during the winter. But a lot of my good memories are with my grandmother.

TE: That's wonderful.

BC: I asked her one time, she dipped snuff with a little tooth--a little--it was a, what was it. Some kind of a birch, some kind of wood. And I would notice her dipping snuff. So I asked her if I could have some one time. She gave it to me, but that was the last.

TE: That was the last time. Well, it was a good lesson though, wasn't it? You learned you didn't like that, for sure.

BC: [Laughing] Yeah.

TE: Did your grandmother also start teaching you how to cook and bake?

BC: She helped me some. My mother taught me to really cook.

TE: Well, that's good. That's good. Do you know where your parents would have gone to buy things that they needed for farming or for just general household stuff?

BC: Yes. They'd go to the Farmers Federation. And Daddy would buy stuff for the cattle, like cottonseed meal and different things.

TE: Was that in Asheville or was that here?

BC: It was out next to Oakley. You go up through there on the right. They had that--

JR: Annie Ager's farm.

TE: Right. And how did they get there?

BC: My dad had one of the first cars, I guess. Not the first but the first two.

TE: Right. One of them. Okay. Super. Super indeed. What were some of your, what you think were the best parts of living in Fairview when you were younger and then later in life, when you had your own children? Just generally best parts of living in Fairview. Was school part of it?

BC: School, yeah.

TE: Tell me about the school. You went to Fairview?

BC: Fairview. Uh-huh. And we'd walk around that school, during recess, all around there and meet other kids and talk and cut up.

TE: How did you get there, to school?

BC: Buses.

TE: Buses came. Okay.

BC: We used to have to walk when we lived down here. It was a long walk over to the edge of the road. And my two brothers went then. And they'd build a little fire over there so we could see the bus coming along and had to put that fire out [laughing].

TE: How interesting. They'd stay warm though, for sure.

BC: Uh-huh.

TE: Very creative on their part. Did your parents hire anybody to help work on the farm, you know, like either at harvesting or planting time?

BC: They hired some and then we had some neighbors that would come and help him. He had horses and they didn't. And they would come and help him, then he would go plow for them.

TE: Swapping and trading services. I like that. Yeah, that's very good.

Let me switch over to your daughter, right now, for a couple of minutes and get some of her input on some of the things that I've asked you.

Were you also born on Merrill Road?

LINDA WILLIAMS: No, I was born at Mission Hospital.

TE: At Mission Hospital. Okay. That's good to know. And, of course, we already know your parents' names and some information. This might be a good time, instead of me asking you to recall from memory where your parents were born and where your grandparents came from and so forth, if you could go back to this book that you have about your family and read about this settlement and how your family started here.

LW: Yes, this book is *Captain Benjamin Merrill and the Merrill Family of North Carolina*. "The first settler in the territory across the crest of the Blue Ridge was Samuel Davidson who came across Swannanoa Gap in the latter part of 1784. He was killed by the Indians and his family was forced to flee to Old Fort, east of the crest of the Blue Ridge. A few months later, in the year 1785, a group of his relatives and friends came from Catawba, across the mountains to the Swannanoa River and formed a colony around the mouth of Bee Tree Creek. These were the first white settlers

west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Western North Carolina. In 1799, just 14 years after this first settlement in Buncombe County, Benjamin and Penelope Merrill and their family of 12 children came to Cane Creek and started a settlement there. They were joined by his brother John and his family, and her sister, Anna McCrary, her husband Boyd McCrary and their family. They all acquired land on Cane Creek, not far from Fairview, and started a colony of Merrills and their kindred".

TE: Very interesting. Now, what--I'm holding this picture of the house that some of your ancestors are seated. And where was the location of this?

LW: That house was located on Biltmore Avenue.

TE: On Biltmore Avenue. Okay.

LW: Across from Mission Hospital.

TE: Okay. What do you know about that house?

LW: It was owned by my great-grandfather, W. D. Galion, his wife, my grandmother and my great uncle.

TE: Do you have any idea of looking at modern-day Biltmore as to where this house would be in that?

LW: I only know it was across the street from Mission Hospital.

TE: Mission Hospital. Okay. That's interesting to think about that. Do you know if there are any building plans, architectural plans, that exist from the construction of that house?

LW: I don't know. I don't really think so.

TE: Okay. Just curious. Let me ask you, Linda, I know you were born, you said, at Mission Hospital. Have you always lived in Fairview?

LW: I left in 1970 and went to college, Kings College in Charlotte.

After college, I moved back here. I lived a year and a half and I received an employment opportunity with First Union National Bank and I moved back to Charlotte, and I retired back here October 2015.

TE: Okay. All right. Nice history. How does it feel being back?

LW: Calm.

[Laughter.]

TE: Feels like you've come home.

LW: Yes.

TE: What are your childhood memories of Fairview?

LW: They were wonderful. The house we lived in was right out there in our yard, next to the big holly tree. We never locked our doors. We were the only family that lived on this road. My fond memories, of course, school, but also Emmas Grove Baptist Church. The church was very active and still is and it was also a way to be with peers our own age and we did a lot of activities together. I went to Fairview Elementary. Had some wonderful teachers there. It was a lot of fun. Then I graduated A. C. Reynolds High School. That was fun.

TE: I'm sure it was. And I'm sure you got to and from school by bus.

LW: By bus.

TE: You mentioned the church and activities going on there. Did you ever have pie suppers?

LW: They had huge meals. Once a year they would have what they call a homecoming. And people that didn't go to church there any longer, perhaps they moved, but someone that lived somewhere else, they would come on this one dedicated Sunday. And they would have this huge meal under a big oak tree next to the church. And you knew whose food that you wanted to get, because one lady made the best pies, one lady made the best

cakes. You know. My great aunt Maddy made the best chicken and dumplings.

TE: Like going to a family reunion, you knew which dish you wanted. Yes.

LW: And typically on Sundays, what most everyone did, they either had a family reunion or they would go and visit different friends and family members. The church had a lot of activities. One of the ministers, Kirstein, he was just a wonderful man. And he would take us and hike on Butler Mountain. And we would take a brown paper sack lunch and sit on the mountain and talk. And that was always so much fun.

TE: That had to be a lot of fun. Growing up in Fairview, did you do any farm work?

LW: To be perfectly honest, I'm not the farm girl.

TE: Mama's looking to see if you're answering this correctly.

LW: My mother loves to be outside and loves to work in the yard, that sort of thing. But that was not me. And my grandmother recognized that and so she kept me inside a lot, cleaning or teaching me to cook. Even tried sewing, but that didn't work.

TE: What do you think was, say as a teenager, what do you think was the best aspect of living in Fairview, or the thing that you remember most?

LW: You know, the Fairview community was so wonderful and everyone supported the kids. The Lion Club was big. They presented me with a good-citizenship award. We had a big 4-H Club that was very active.

TE: What did you do in 4-H?

LW: Cooking demonstrations. I was actually in 1970 the North Carolina 4-H Health Queen.

TE: Well, congratulations. That's wonderful.

LW: So, Miss Carter was our leader and she spent a lot of time with all of us kids, helping us to be able to present a cooking presentation or raise animals. Those kind of things. So I have very fond memories of that.

TE: What I'm hearing from you is that there was an extremely strong sense of community going on.

LW: Do you think that's still present today?

TE: I do, since I have only been here for two-and-a-half years, I'm still learning. There's so many new people in the area. I'm still learning, but I still get the sense there is a strong sense of community and teamwork.

TE: What about you Mrs. Cunningham? Do you think that the community comes together to support?

BC: Oh, yes. Uh-huh, I do.

TE: And so it's been going on a long time. It just takes different forms now, too, in how that support is given.

BC: Yes.

TE: Going back to your school again. What kind of, and this could be elementary as well as high school. Were there any kinds of celebrations that took place at school, like for holidays?

LW: We had an elementary dance. And the Fletchers came and taught us dance. And I don't know if you know Maria Bell Fletcher. She was Miss America in the sixties, and that was her father.

TE: Wow.

LW: And they would come and teach us kids tap dance, jazz, those kind of things. And we also had a lady, lived off Emmas Grove, Mrs. Proffitt, and she taught piano. And so she taught a lot of us kids how to play the piano.

TE: I want to switch over to your mama now. Miss Cunningham, we had pictures of you on the basketball team. I'd like to hear some of your thoughts and memories of being on that basketball team, if you would share those, please.

BC: It was great. I was left-handed and so I had to practice to how-- we had a little place on the garage where we lived down there and it had a lard bucket, I think it was. We had just a rubber ball and my brothers both were older than I was, but they'd get down there and play, too, and I'd, you know, play there. And when I went to school, why, when they chose the basketball team, I think I was in the ninth or tenth grade, and I made that first team, basketball.

And so, this other girl was left-handed. And so we really won most of the games.

TE: Congratulations.

LW: If I could interject. What she hasn't told you, her nickname was Lefty.

TE: Okay.

BC: And there's still some of them, even at church, call me Lefty.

TE: So some of those ladies that you were on the basketball team with are still living in this area?

BC: I don't know. I think there's one or two still.

TE: Okay. But some people that you know that knew you played basketball call you Lefty?

BC: Yeah, still.

TE: Okay. That's kind of nice, I think, to have that going on in your life.

JR: Out of town?

TE: Did you go on out-of-town trips for games or just local?

BC: Just local.

TE: Just local games?

BC: We played at the City Auditorium a time or two.

TE: Okay. Well, Linda told us some about her teenage years. What were your teenage years like in Fairview? You played basketball. What other activities?

BC: I played softball, too.

TE: Okay. And were you, did you pitch or were you a catcher?

BC: Pitch.

TE: Okay. A lefty.

BC: Uh=huh. In basketball, coach taught me how to, you know, fake then shoot. And so another girl was left-handed and we won--I think we won first place that year.

TE: You were a very athletic young woman, weren't you?

BC: Uh-huh. And I had this one teacher, she taught home ec. She was huge, honestly. Her legs were so big and she came from Oakley. Oakley, they tried to beat us every time. And I remember one time, a different woman sometimes would pick me up and take me, you know, and we were a little late getting there. And we got there and she kept saying, "Hurry, Betty, hurry". But I was trying to get my suit on and she got me up on her legs and tried to get my suit on. I never will forget that. She wanted me to beat them so bad.

[Laughter.]

TE: Sounds like you had a lot of fun.

BC: I did.

TE: That's good. That was very, very good.

BC: The coach a lot of times would tell me, motion me, when to shoot. I had a lot of fun playing basketball.

TE: You mentioned two brothers. Did you have any sisters?

BC: Oh, yeah.

TE: Were they athletic, any of your sisters athletic?

BC: One of my sisters played some, but not a lot.

TE: Not a much as you.

BC: No.

TE: What about church activities when you were a teenager? What kind of things were done, did you do at the church?

BC: One time they'd--we'd take a picnic, they'd take us up on Butler Mountain and had a picnic up there. And, of course, they always had Christmas programs and all that.

TE: Well, let me ask both of you this question, Ms. Cunningham and Linda. In each of you thinking about your young years and becoming adults, were there any citizens of Fairview, other than white individuals? Were there any African Americans?

BC: Yes. There was some that lived not too far from us up there. The Robinsons.

TE: Okay. What about in school? Did you have any classmates that were--

BC: Not very many.

LW: I did. I experienced in high school, when the schools were changed.

TE: Was it a very stressful time or how did that go?

LW: Actually, no, it wasn't stressful, because everyone got along.

TE: You just accepted each other as individuals?

LW: Uh-huh. I think it may have been stressful for them to be in such a heavy populated white school. But, you know, everybody got along. There were no fights, nothing of that nature.

TE: Well, since we're talking about high school now, Linda, with the racial integration going on, what was prom like during your high school years?

LW: Formal.

[Laughter.]

LW: I know they had great bands. They had a great band each year.

TE: And where was it held?

LW: A. C. Reynolds. The old A. C. Reynolds. Not the new school.

TE: Okay. I'm not familiar with the area. Would it have been in the same location of the old high school?

LW: No, it moved. And we had a wonderful principal, Mr. Dalton. The librarian, we always called her Jake. And she was wonderful. She still comes to a lot of the reunions that are held now.

TE: Nice. Very nice. What kind of stores were in Fairview, Mrs. Cunningham, when either a teenager or a young married woman, what kind of stores did you have to shop in?

BC: Hmmm. Just the grocery stores is all.

TE: Okay. So if you needed to buy clothes or something you either made them or maybe went into Asheville? Did that change, Linda?

BC: My mother used to make all my dresses.

LW: When I was growing up, there was Hallington's that was close to where the Dollar General is today, on Charlotte Highway. Wilsons owned a store on that Charlotte Highway, on the right, where there's a stone company now. We also had Fairview Supply.

TE: And what was that?

LW: It was down at the intersection of Cane Creek and Charlotte Highway. It's still a store there today. I don't recall the name of it. But on Saturdays we had to get up and do our chores, do our cleaning, and then we would go into Asheville to shop. We shopped at Dillard's, Woolworth's, Kress, Sears. And we always ate lunch at S&W Cafeteria. And my grandfather, he would drive us there. And he would park way down at the courthouse, because he didn't want to go into the full city to try to park and we'd have to walk.

JR: That was long before the mall was built. It was Ivey's then.

LW: And it was Ivey's, not Dillard's, yes.

JR: Bon Marché?

LW: Bon Marché. I even took inventory there one Saturday.

TE: And how often did you all do this?

LW: Every Saturday.

TE: Okay. I missed that part. Okay. Every Saturday. Wow. So that was something to look forward to.

BC: He'd park at the courthouse and we'd have to walk all the way.

LW: Yeah, during the week some, there was a grocer in Biltmore, Trantham's, and my grandmother, when she wanted to make extra money, she would make her homemade butter, and she would make her butter and put them in a mold and on the mold of the top was a swan. And whatever my grandmother made, he wanted to buy it because his customers, a lot of them were from Biltmore Forest. And they would beg to buy my grandmother's butter and different things. And that's how she made extra money. But he got so he liked her butter, too, and he saved him so much of that butter.

TE: She made some good butter, sounds like. I'm curious if you knew or remember, either of you, how much--was a sold in a pound cake or what size?

LW: It was a round cake of butter. I have no idea what they--

TE: Just curious. Do you remember how much she sold it for? How much she got paid for a mound of butter?

LW: I don't remember. It wasn't a lot.

TE: I was just curious. Miss Cunningham, when you were a young woman, and let's say a married woman, did you feel safe in Fairview?

BC: Yes, I did. Yes.

TE: What about you, Linda? When you were a teenager and growing up, did you feel safe?

LW: Oh, very much safe. We didn't even lock our doors.

TE: What about today?

LW: Oh, we lock our doors today.

TE: Even though you lock your doors now, has that security of feeling safe gone down some or--

LW: I feel quite secure here.

TE: Okay.

LW: I think you have to be smart about it, though, and be careful and notice your surroundings.

TE: Right. Earlier, before we started recording, we were talking about some things as pictures came up and it was mentioned about a relative that was on the *Intrepid*, your brother. Could you tell us some more about that now that we're recording?

BC: Would like for Linda to tell it, if she will do it.

TE: Okay. That's fine.

LW: What Uncle Bob would tell me is they were on the *Intrepid* and it was a very heavy, furious fight and he said that every man on that ship dropped to his knees and prayed. And when the battle was over, he was walking around the ship, started down the steps where they were bringing the deceased through and this one soldier looked at my uncle and said, "Oh, I thought I just carried you out". And that's about all he would ever talk about, just how furious the battle was.

TE: Very traumatic.

LW: Yes.

TE: Well, it's easy to understand why he didn't want to talk about it. But I wanted that to be on the record and clear.

LW: Now the other interesting fact was mother's other brother, T. C., or Johnny they would call him. He was sent to Italy and they put him with two Italian men. And they went up high on the mountain. And my grandmother never received any letters from him. And she was getting very, very nervous and anxious because she was worried about her son. And she went all the way, wrote letters to the President, wanting to know if her son was okay. And they responded to her.

TE: Wonderful.

LW: What had happened is he had appendicitis on that mountain and had to be carried out.

TE: Oh, my gosh.

LW: And he also told me that when he was finally sent home, they, of course, went by ship and it landed in New York. And each soldier was given this wonderful steak dinner. But they just couldn't wait for that steak dinner. But then when they actually got to eat, they found that they couldn't eat it all because the rations had been minimal, of course. And when he first

went into the service--I can't remember exactly where they were going but they went by train. And there weren't beds. You just laid on a plank of wood.

TE: Do you know where in Italy?

LW: No.

TE: Okay. And what about your Uncle Bob?

LW: He was in the navy.

TE: He was in the navy and do you know the location of where this battle--

BC: He was on the *USS Intrepid.*

TE: And do we know where the location of that battle took place?

LW: I'd have to ask his son.

BC: He said that they had orders to go up through that canal, and they knew the Japanese would be on both sides. And he said, you talk about some sailors praying, they did. And some way they got up through there.

TE: Well, they were very fortunate to come home, weren't they? And blessed, for sure.

Do either of you have memory of maybe family stories or just stories about the area, that some of the older folks might have told each of you at one time, or stories handed down through the family?

LW: One thought I had that may be of interest is we didn't have a library in Fairview.

TE: Okay.

LW: But we had a bookmobile and down the road was some ladies, the Barnwells, and books were brought there. So while you were in school, you know, the library was in Asheville, so we would walk over to the Barnwells' house and check out books during the summer.

TE: Oh, yeah. Now, was this time period that Fairview did not have a library, was that when you were in elementary school?

LW: Yes.

TE: Now what about high school? Was there one then, do you know?

LW: No.

TE: Okay. All right. Did the high school have a library?

LW: Yes.

TE: Okay. They did.

LW: A lot of encyclopedias were sold during that time.

TE: For sure. And you said the ladies whose house you went to to check out books were the Barnwells?

LW: Uh-huh.

TE: Okay. Do you know if any of those family members are still around?

LW: They aren't, but they do have some family left.

TE: Okay. Is there anything that either of you have, a special thought, a special memory, or something that I have not mentioned, that neither of us have mentioned, that you would like to share for this oral history, about Fairview or just general memories? You've shared a lot already.

LW: Well, this book right here is my mother's 1948 high school annual.

TE: '48.

LW: It shows the principal of the school, the teachers, photographs.

TE: And that's going to be scanned so that Pack Library will have that.

LW: Yes.

TE: Super.

LW: You mentioned about stores. Here it shows some stores, Compliments of Merrell's Store in Fairview, compliments of B. L. Riddle Grocery, Moore & Fite Grocery.

TE: Do you know Merrell's Store was--

LW: On down Charlotte Highway; past Cane Creek intersection, on the left.

TE: Okay. And were they related?

LW: Yes.

TE: Okay. And what did they sell there?

LW: Groceries.

TE: Groceries, okay. Not clothing but groceries.

BC: Not clothing, but food, too.

TE: Kind of general, whatever you needed.

BC: Uh-huh, right.

TE: You have deep roots, certainly, in Fairview, in this community.

Judith, did you have something?

Well, thank you, Miss Cunningham, Linda Williams, for sharing this information with us today, and it's going to--all this information you've shared is going to be in that Pack Library, North Carolina Room, for others in future generations to read about you and hear what you thought about Fairview in your younger days and then later. So, thank you again. We appreciate it very much.

BC: You're very welcome.

LW: You're welcome.

[End of interview.]